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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9886
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RUEHTRO/USLO TRIPOLI 0021
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEAWJB/DOJ WASHDC
RHHJJAA/JICPAC HONOLULU HI
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC
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SUBJECT: ABB Shunned in West Sumatra

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: In contrast with the relative success Abu Bakar Ba'asyir received in Java, he got a very cool reception during his recent visit to staunchly Muslim West Sumatra, where local religious leaders blocked him from speaking at the largest and most influential mosques and school officials prevented him from speaking at a local university. Ba'asyir did speak before a small group on the grounds of the parliament and preach at a relatively uninfluential mosque. As in Java, his subject was the imposition of syariah law. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Several Muslim groups including Front Pembela Syariat Islam Padang (FPIP), Hizbut Tahir, (HTI) and Dewan Dakwah (DDI) invited Abu Bakar Ba'asyir to Padang, West Sumatra, for two high-profile events: leading the Friday, July 28 prayers at an influential Mosque and giving a public address in the town center.

¶3. (SBU) According to leaders from Muhammadiyah and the Prosperous Justice Party in Padang, Ba'asyir hoped to lead Friday prayers and speak at Taqwa Mosque, one of the city's largest and most influential. Taqwa's (Muhammadiyah)ulemas, however, rejected this plan at the last minute with a transparently weak excuse: the mosque's regular imam was already scheduled to preach. Ba'asyir's schedulers then proposed that he lead the prayers at the large Ganting mosque (unaffiliated), but Ganting's leaders rejected him as well. In the end, Ba'asyir was relegated to preaching at the smaller, relatively unimportant, Al-Ustah mosque.

¶4. (SBU) Plans for Ba'asyir's public address met similar obstacles. Organizers intended for Ba'asyir to speak at Imam Bonjol field near the center of town. Local authorities, however, rejected this plan. When organizers tried to relocate the event to Eka Sakti University they found

themselves blocked by the University rector. Ultimately, Ba'asyir was able to speak to a group of approximately 100 people outside the parliament building.

¶ 15. (SBU) At the parliament building Ba'asyir spoke about the imposition of Syariah internationally. According to an Ulema from Muhammadiyah, the message fell flat because the predominant Minang people already blend Syariah into their daily life and culture.

¶ 16. (SBU) A member of parliament from the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) who attended the speech said the audience's response was flat and that far fewer people attended than the organizers expected. He also said that people did not respond to the message because the "Minang people of West Sumatra tend to be objective" and, clearly attacking Ba'asyir's message, said that the "Minang only support correct ideas and teaching." A local journalist described the cool reception Ba'asyir received by saying it was as if the people had "lost their tradition of treating guests with respect".

¶ 17. (SBU) Comment: Of Sumatra's many ethnic groups, two stand out for the important role Islam plays in their culture and identity: the Acehnese of North Sumatra and the Minang of West Sumatra. In the case of the Minang, it appears that the groups' strong cultural association with Islam may help inoculate it from more radical ideology. It also shows that, in West Sumatra at least, leaders of mainstream Muslim groups, particularly Muhammadiyah, are willing to actively shun extremists like Ba'asyir. End comment.

Pascoe